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## Female trucker proves herself in the Bakken

DICKINSON, N.D. -- Tasha Tarrell wants women in boomtowns to know there's more than McDonald's or Walmart for work. The oilfield is their oyster.

By: Katherine Lymn, Forum News Service

DICKINSON, N.D. -- Tasha Tarrell wants women in boomtowns to know there's more than McDonald's or Walmart for work. The oilfield is their oyster.

As one of six female truck drivers at Nuverra Environmental Solutions, Tarrell has proven herself and has grown to love her job along the way.

"She's a great employee. She works harder than a lot of the guys here too," dispatcher Tony Swanson said. "She's always there when we need her to get the job done."

She works a rotation of six days on with one off, then five on with two off. She leaves the yard earlier than most each morning -- by 3:30 a.m. -- to avoid the dangerous traffic on Highway 22.

She's lived in southwest North Dakota for more than 20 years -- formerly in Mott and now just south of Dickinson -- and used to haul grain, but that got old, she said.

About five years ago, as the boom was hitting its stride, Tarrell took a job driving a truck for Nuverra, then Power Fuels.

She now hauls saltwater at wells around the Killdeer Mountains.

"I've been driving truck pretty much for as long as I could drive," Tarrell said. "... Hauling grain got kinda monotonous, with the grain dust. Just wanted to try something different."

Tarrell is starting her sixth year with Nuverra.

She acknowledges that her thin frame -- she's only slightly heavier than the chains she puts on her tires -- means she can't always lift like the men she works with.

It's not an obstacle for her, though.

"When I need help, all I have to do is ask," Tarrell said.

As for being a woman in a male-dominated workforce -- and region -- it's not like it used to be, she said.

"When I first started here, it was do or die. You either did your job and you did it well, or you didn't make it," Tarrell said.

"It took a while. You have to prove yourself, you do," she added. "... Now it's a little bit more relaxed, now everybody's more receiving of women coming in. Back then, it was a little more like, 'Oh, wait, maybe this is, maybe it isn't.' It was, it was tougher back then."

At truck stops Tarrell used to get a little trouble, but set a tone quickly.

"I'm tiny but I've got a rule: Nobody jumps on my truck steps, and I enforce it," she said. "... I had to be that way."

And it worked.

"Actually, I've not had very many problems at all. A few, but they were handled," she said with a laugh.

Five other women drive for Nuverra out of about 110 drivers at the company, based a couple of miles north of Dickinson on Highway 22.

And Tarrell wants other women to know they can do this, too.

"I'm just a normal girl, and I can do it," she said. "There's times I need help, but I want women to understand that. Look at me. I'm not big, I'm not burly, it doesn't matter what I look like. But I can do it."

They live south of town on their own little seven-acre zoo, with -- among other animals -- three horses, about 20 cats (one indoor) and a peacock that loves blueberries.

"Pretty much anything that wanders onto my place has a home," she said.

Tarrell has an attachment to her truck, and even gave it a name.

"When I got her she looked so bright and shiny and silver, like a bell," she said. "I thought Belle and then I thought, nah, that's too Disney. Isabella."

The next day she works, she'll be back early, ready to give Isabella another day on the roads.

Tarrell said she doesn't listen to music while she drives, because she listens to her truck to make sure it's running healthy.

In the yard behind Nuverra's offices, she hops off the steps and says goodbye until her next shift.

"I'll see you in the morning, girl."

The trucker married Darin Tarrell, a district manager at Nuverra, in 2011.

She said the wives of oilfield workers have options when they come here with their husbands.

"You can do this too. It's a great life," she said. "I really want women to know that you can do it."